Y-LEAD

Creating Civic Spaces for Active Citizenship

Politically Empowering Youth through Information Technology

Policy Paper

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Contents

Abstract

The use of social media sparked youth uprisings in 2011 and 2013. In recent years, however, there has been a gradual decline of youth participation in the political and public sphere. Opinion polls have shown that despite high youth awareness around the importance of such participation, participation rates remain relatively low (Y-LEAD, 2019). With the increasing general use of technology and social media, there is a potential of implementing new measures politically empower youth through information technology.

This policy paper explores the limited use of technology in the political empowerment of Egyptian youth, and the necessity to unify efforts in order to establish mechanisms that could help increase youth political awareness, political participation, and prepare a cadre of youth capable of assuming public executive and legislative jobs, on a local and national scale.

The paper proposes three alternatives to promote youth political empowerment: the first alternative suggests **organizing a national campaign to encourage and support youth to run in local and parliamentary elections.** The second alternative concerns **establishing executive leadership programs at the local and central levels.** The third alternative involves **stimulating Egyptian political life through technology, and establishing roles for youth in political work.** After an evaluation of the current situation of the country versus the proposed alternatives, the first alternative to organize a national campaign using information technology to support youth to run in local and parliamentary elections was chosen as the best alternative to politically empower youth in Egypt.

Rationale

Youth are considered to be integral members in society as they possess unique characteristics that distinguishes them from all other age groups. Yet, they are categorized differently across the world. For instance, the United Nations (UN) define youth to be between the ages of 18 and 24, whereas the Egyptian constitution states that youth are between the ages of 18 and 35. Given this, Egyptian youth constitute about 60% of Egypt's total population. Hence, the empowerment of Egyptian youth is vital for securing good governance, sustainable development and future leadership.

Therefore, in order to successfully empower youth, their participation in the public and political sphere must be increased. Political awareness is mainly attained through an increase in political education concerning all political issues and developments that Egypt has encountered.

Youth empowerment is conveyed through different actions in this policy paper, such as:

- Increasing their political awareness,
- Informing them of their rights and duties,
- Emphasizing the necessity for their participation in the political sphere,
- Giving them the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process,
- Enabling them to compete for public positions.

Over the last decade, the use of internet technologies such as blogs and social media platforms has risen in the political scene and has created unprecedented opinions around the concept of 'freedom' amongst today's Egyptian youth. Social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, various blogging sites, and even SMS messaging enabled previously disconnected masses of people, who before had no practical way of quickly communicating their perceptions and ideas across significant distances, to instantly share these thoughts (Bailly, 2012).
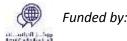
Technology was used as a virtual public space that enabled its users to easily express their opinions and ideas directly to the decision makers and the public. Yet, despite the increasing use of social media and online platforms by the Egyptian youth, its impact on political empowerment is still weak.

The following are some reasons behind the limited number of youth involved in politics despite their general interest in the subject:

- The large number of youth coalitions that were formed during the 2011 and 2013 uprisings disintegrated due to increased numbers, rise in competition, lack of coordination and unclear programs.

- The inadequate representation in the government executive and legislative institutions.

- The lack of inclusive policies as government policies to empower youth solely focus on university students who only comprise a small fraction of youth compared to the large number of technical school students and uneducated youth who lack political awareness.

- The agenda of the government is currently centered around entertainment and services rather than the political awareness of youth.

- The underrepresentation of youth in political parties, as the elite are the older generation which makes youth more reluctant and/or unable to assume positions in these parties.

- The lack of coordination between governmental and civil society initiatives.

- The lack of private initiatives concerning youth empowerment.

Given their large numbers and their vital role in the future development of the country, consequences could emerge due to the youth's lack of inclusion in Egypt's political and public sphere. On an individual level, it can lead to a decline in several feelings associated with their importance, worthiness and degree of patriotism. On a bigger scale, it could result with a crippling effect on their national affiliation towards Egypt, which may negatively impact the future of politics throughout the country. Given this, emphasis has been placed on the importance of youth political empowerment, where technology can be used as a means to achieve this goal.

Existing Public Policies and Governmental Political Empowerment Programs

The successful use of social media in both the January 25 and June 30 uprisings demonstrated the capacity of social media in strengthening social and opposition movements as it provided youth political activists with an opportunity to produce innovative media content in an unprecedented way.

The state can successfully deal with this matter for many reasons, amongst them include:

- The state has various institutions of advanced technological capabilities which could be directed towards mobilizing public opinion in order to promote and achieve the political empowerment of youth.

- The state can build on existing laws and could develop future legislations to regulate the use of technology to achieve the interests and goals of the state, among which is youth empowerment.

- The state is capable of broadcasting on air and online presentations to the public. Such presentations will be given by academic and administrative teams in order to increase youth political awareness, train youth on how to participate in politics, analyze problems related to youth empowerment, suggest solutions and increase communication among the youth.

- The state is capable of stimulating political empowerment of youth by directing the efforts of government agencies, civil society organizations and private and individual initiatives towards using technology to empower youth.

There are several government programs aimed to empower youth in which technology is used to select those enrolled in the programs and whereby applicants of each program are required to register through dedicated websites. Later, the results of those accepted are announced online. Some of these programs use online tools and technologies to train those accepted, and to evaluate them at the end of the programs. Some of the government programs are listed below:

- **Presidential Leadership Program** (PLP) publishes its conditions of acceptance on its website. These conditions state that the applicant must be Egyptian, between 20 to 30 years old, holds a university degree, and be of good conduct and behavior (has not been previously charged with crimes against honour). Applications are filled online, and those accepted to the program are notified by e-mail (PLP website, 2020)

- **National Training Academy** implements many training programs for Egyptian youth. E-mails are used to communicate with the youth applicants. Acceptance is sent by the academy by e-mail (PLP website, 2020).

- **Youth conferences and forums** require interested Egyptian youth to register their information on the National Youth Conference website. Those who are chosen to participate in youth conferences and forums are contacted by e-mail (Egyptian youth registration website, 2020)

- **Nasser Higher Military Academy** offers courses to youth. The academy's website assigns a unique email address for each course and applicant who wishes to

attend these courses. They are aligned with one's academic interests. Applicants should email their applications to the academy for consideration. (NHMA website, 2020)

- **Ministry of Youth and Sports** (MoYS) offer programs which include preparing trainers on how to deal and face rumors as well as the impact of rumors on national security. Programs for community leaders in youth centers, Boys Scouts training and Youth Parliamentary training are also conducted. Most of these programs are implemented through MoYS and are announced on their website. Other programs are implemented through civil education departments located at the governorates level (MoYS website, 2020)

- **The Coordination Committee of Party's Youth Leaders and Politicians** (CPYP) was suggested to be formed during a youth conference and was supported by President Sisi. CPYP has a Facebook page through which communication is made between its members and political parties' members (CPYP Facebook page, 2020)

- **Universities' simulation models (and programs)** are implemented in a number of Egyptian universities, such as Cairo and Assiut Universities, where a website is dedicated to each model in order to facilitate communication with its members. Online lectures are available on the models' websites.

Only a small group of youth benefit from such programs. This is largely due to the specific qualifications and skills in the programs' terms of acceptance which narrow the field for a large segment of youth. For instance, the number of youths who attended and graduated from different PLP programs do not exceed 3000 young people. Most of these graduates attended youth conferences and held leadership positions in the period from 2014 to 2019. Hence, they represent the elite youth that are present in the Egyptian political scene.

While some organizations such as the Nasser Higher Military Academy does not require specific qualifications and skills, it did not capitalize on the knowledge acquired by the youth who participated in its programs. For instance, the 3600 young men and women who participated in the courses and programs offered in cooperation with MoYS from 2016 to 2019, were never contacted post-graduation.

Additionally, these government programs are not carried out in coordination with civil society programs as well as private and individual initiatives targeted at political youth empowerment. This often leads to the duplication of efforts and failure to achieve the accumulation necessary to an improved performance by youth politically.

Alternatives

This policy paper seeks to identify alternatives to address the Egyptian youths lack of political empowerment. Though utilizing the technology that youth use, these alternatives will provide pathways to politically empower youth and will be in line with the programs that were developed by the government to achieve this goal.

Following extensive research on the subject, the following three alternatives were developed:

The first alternative: **organizing a national campaign to encourage and support youth to run in local and parliamentary elections.**

The second alternative: **establishing executive leadership programs at the local and central levels.**

The third alternative: **stimulating Egyptian political life through technology, and establishing roles for youth in political work.**

Below is an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of each of these alternatives, the short and long-term interventions that will help achieving each alternative and an evaluation of each alternative.

Alternative One

Organizing a national campaign to encourage and support youth to run in local and parliamentary elections.

Given that the Egyptian constitution stipulates that youth should hold 25% of Local Council positions, a national campaign to support youth to run in elections would be relevant and beneficial to the states goals, especially with the approaching dissemination of the Local Laws and the Parliamentary Elections Law, and the local and parliamentary elections that will follow. This national campaign should be launched across two platforms; social media (online) and through training sessions and workshops for youth (offline). This alternative seeks to help youth by

providing them with necessary services that will enable their political empowerment.

Advantages of the First Alternative

− The material provided could introduce youth to the new electoral laws.

− The campaign could train potential youth candidates who wish to run for local or parliamentary elections on how to campaign.

− Following the presentations, youth should be acquainted with knowledge of the Parliament and local people's councils.

− Lectures could be provided in person or online to raise awareness regarding existing laws from experts and specialized professors.

− The campaign could potentially reach a large number of youths who want to participate in political life and require support in refining their skills in this field

− The campaign could reach youth who are reluctant to understand the importance of political and community participation in general, and that their participation could help in the overall development of the country.

Disadvantages of the First Alternative

− Youth have little to no interest in political education websites.

− The voluntary nature of membership in the local councils may lead to youth being reluctant to run for local elections.

− Finding funding for training sessions and workshops to provide courses for youth could be challenging.

Short-term interventions

− An online platform on social media could be established to provide training, awareness, and political education. These tools would be used to increase youth the awareness of youth public policy. In addition to this, interactive communication between the government and youth would take place in order to stimulate youth's interest in political and social participation and public work and to hone their skills as in efforts to politically empower the youth.

− In person trainings and lectures could be organized for youth who wish to run in the local councils and parliament. These lectures and trainings should be facilitated by professors specializing in political science and constitutional law. Current or former members of the House of Representatives and local councils could also assist by providing lectures to increase youth's knowledge on the competencies of both local councils and Parliament, the rights and duties of their members, and how to successfully campaign.

Long-term interventions

− Amending the Parliamentary Elections Law to allocate a quota for youth in the next parliament.

− Adhering to the constitutional texts that already have an established a quota for youth in the local councils which amounts to 25% of the seats in the local councils, and which the new law should adhere to as well.

Alternative Two

Establishing executive leadership programs at the local and central levels.

The main goal of politically empowering youth is not to provide them with employment opportunities in leadership positions, but rather to present them with fair opportunities to compete for those positions, which can only be achieved through increasing their capacities to qualify them to assume such positions. A mechanism that could achieve this is the establishment of a program to prepare potential leaders at the local level to qualify youth to assume executive positions at the local and central levels (executive jobs in local units in villages, cities, districts and governorate levels) as well as at the central level (by qualifying youth to hold higher executive positions such as ministers or assistant ministers).

Part of this program could be organized online through varied social media platforms, and the other part could be through in person trainings and courses.

Advantages of the Second Alternative

− Training courses organized within the framework of the program could help in increasing the awareness and political education of youth.

− Seeking specialized professors to deliver online lectures to reach a large number of youths within the framework

of the program could provide them with the best source of knowledge to increase their likelihood of success.

- Given its direct relevance with the states goals, there is potential for the coordination between this program and other similar Developing Leaders Programs implemented by other government agencies, universities and ministries (such as the Ministry of Youth and Sports).

Disadvantages of the Second Alternative

- Opinion polls conducted in Egypt regarding citizens level of confidence in office-holders reveals that the general public has less confidence in the younger office-holders, and therefore there may not be strong community support for this alternative.

- The "Seniority" culture which is widely spread in government agencies may resist to the idea of empowering youth or allowing those who are qualified to take on leadership positions.

- Establishing a fair criterion for selecting those who will be trained, and to follow through with them following the completion of their training in order to capitalize on the expertise they have acquired.

Short-term interventions

- Developing a dynamic website to facilitate communication with youth who want to participate in public work and who are aspiring to attain political positions.

- Organizing training courses to increase youth skills in the areas that are essential to administrative work, and to inform them of the local administration law and its executive regulations.

Long-term interventions

- Amending the prerequisites for holding executive leadership positions, and removing the criteria regarding the age limit and seniority.

- Allocating a quota for youth in executive institutions.

- Continuing to assign youth to fill the positions of assistant ministers and deputy governors provided that the chosen candidates have already graduated from the Presidential Leadership Program.

Alternative Three

Stimulating Egyptian political life through technology and establishing roles for youth in political work.

Currently political parties in Egypt remain detached from the reality of the everyday lives of Egyptians and their programs are either unannounced, unclear, or non-existent. Henceforth, stems the importance of stimulating political life in Egypt through the use of technology. Political leadership has shown great interest in this issue, as President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's called for the formation of - the Coordination Committee of Party's Youth Leaders and Politicians (CPYP) which aims to increase youth engagement with Egyptian partisan life and to promote political education for youth in political parties' in Egypt.

Advantages of the Third Alternative

- Stimulating the role of political parties might support the democratization process in Egypt.

- This alternative could present an opportunity to increase the number of members joining political parties.

- This alternative could provide political parties with the opportunity to publicize their programs to reach a larger percentage of the population.

- This alternative could enhance communication between the partisan bases of each political party, its leadership and its various committees.

Disadvantages of the Third Alternative

- Youth representation in political parties is low, and this alternative does not provide any guarantees for increasing this representation.

- Most of the political parties are unknown to the Egyptian citizens and require a long period of time to publicize themselves and become known.

- The large numbers of political parties and the similarity of their programs makes it difficult for youth to decide which party to join.

- As a result of wrong practices by a number of political parties following the January 25th events, people's confidence in political parties work has decreased.

Short-term interventions

– Developing websites for political parties that do not have websites. These websites should contain the basic information, contact details, political leaders and their ideologies.

– Reactivating existing websites and improving their efficiency, accessibility and updating their information to allow for effective and easy communication with youth.

– The CPYP should develop a website for the purpose of facilitating easy communication between its members and existing political parties. Moreover, CPYP should coordinate and align its youth empowerment activities with other relevant governmental activities.

– Encouraging the cadres of political parties to engage in political education activities for their younger members.

Long-term interventions

– Negotiate with political parties that have similar programs to collaborate or merge with one another

– Amending the existing law on Political Parties and increasing the minimum number required to establish a new party in order to ensure the party's seriousness, desire to compete with other political parties and willingness to form a government.

Evaluation of the Alternatives

The first alternative has the potential to be accepted by the Executive Authority as it is consistent with the programs developed for this purpose. Given the youth's increasing use of technology and social media and the low cost of its implementation, it is considered to be a suitable option. Data suggests that prior to the January 25 revolution only 4.5 million Egyptians had Facebook accounts, but during the first four months of 2011, "approximately two million new Facebook accounts" (Baily, 2012) had been created, this reveals that social media has been able to provide a platform for Egyptian citizens who wish to engage more in politics in an easy, free and convenient way. In terms of sustainability, this alternative can be easily implemented and is feasible and therefore; it is possible to continue to capitalize on this alternative until it has achieved its purpose. As for its effectiveness; it is more likely that this alternative could achieve the target outcomes and reach a large target audience with great efficiency, benefits, and high applicability due to the use of online platforms which will enable convenience and a sense of security for interested youth

Given that the political leadership and the Egyptian government stated that the political empowerment of the youth was a state goal, the second alternative could be politically accepted. However, in terms of suitability, this alternative may not be effective as there are other similar government programs such as the Presidential Leadership Program - PLP, and other programs offered by the National Training Academy which have the same goals of this alternative. With respect to the sustainability of this alternative; applying this alternative requires funding resources which may be difficult to secure for a long time. As for its effectiveness, this alternative can be implemented effectively only if it is being implemented by outsourced specialists and if it is adequately advertised. Furthermore, the implementation of this alternative relies on unifying all government efforts aimed at empowering youth, and for effective coordination among all government agencies in order to avoid duplicated efforts and in order to save time and resources

Implementing alternative three could be successful, especially given that the political leadership was keen about establishing the CPYP. However, in terms of suitability, applying this alternative may not be fitting due to the lack of prior communication between political parties, and the difficulty that CPYP will face while carrying out this task due to its novelty and lack of experience. The success and sustainability of this alternative depend on the level of responsiveness it receives from the leadership of the political parties'; however, this alternative may not produce the expected outcomes due to the apparent weakness of partisan life in Egypt. With regards to its effectiveness, it is difficult to coordinate with all political parties in Egypt which may diminish the possibility of implementing this alternative successfully or the expectation of immediate results when executed.

Recommendations

Based on the evaluation of the three alternatives using the criteria of political acceptance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, suitability and applicability, it is recommended that the state adopts the first alternative: organizing a national campaign to encourage and support youth to run in local and parliamentary elections as a solution to politically empower Egyptian youth.

This alternative will be the most effective due to its global preexisting success in regard to democratization and political empowerment of youth. Previous implementations have revealed that participating in local councils provide a foundational education in which youth learn to engage in public work, increase their knowledge of political affairs and the problems and challenges facing their country. Through this, they develop a sense of commitment and responsibility to improve their country. Furthermore, they gain the qualifications to assume higher positions and take on more tasks in the future in either the legislative or executive field.

Once established, the national campaign can coordinate with the existing programs working in the field of political education of the youth which are organized by government agencies, civil society organizations or individual initiatives. Together, these different stakeholders can collaborate together to boost the political awareness and participation of youth through the use of technology, which in turn, would politically empower them. The proposal to create an online youth platform is the best alternative to implement the short-term recommendation, which will enable them to more openly express their views and practice their political rights.

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